

Honoré Vinck. Pie X et les réformes liturgiques de 1911-1914. Psautier, bréviaire, calendrier et rubriques. (Liturgiewissenschaftlichen Quellen und Forschungen 102), Aschendorf: Münster. ISBN-10: 3402112663 / ISBN-13: 978-3402112663.

Abstract

The reform of the Roman Breviary of the years 1911-1914, under the pontificate of Pius X (1903-1914), caused a great number of contemporaneous comments, and later, lines or sometimes pages were mentioned in liturgical textbooks or in occasional articles on the subject. However, no original and scientific study of the reform of the Roman breviary has been carried out in the past 100 years. For more than forty years now, the reform of Pope Pius X has been replaced by another reform, after Vatican II. It is time to subject the first reform to serious scrutiny, to clarify each of the options taken, to measure the impact on the daily life of the clergy, and to assess its influence on the evolution of the practices of the Roman Liturgy in general.

The main source for this study is the official collection of the acts of the reform commission, kept in the Vatican Library. Secondly, the private papers of Pietro Piacenza, the most important member of the reform commission, preserved in the library of the *Ephemerides Liturgicae* in Rome have been used. Several other archives in Rome and elsewhere have delivered additional but important information, as those of the Congregation of rites, the *Archivio Segreto* of the Vatican, and the ancient Abbey of San Gerolamo in Rome.

The challenge

An achievement such as a Breviary reform requires a favourable global situation. The offices of the ferial cycle, more diversified but longer than the offices of the sanctoral cycle and the common cycle, had become as good as out of use.

By the turn of the century, an overflow of the calendar of the feasts of the saints as well as a congestion of offices and texts, had led to an extreme complexity in the daily recitation of the Breviary. In combination with ever increasing pastoral charges, the secular and regular clergy were seeking loopholes for verbose offices, in the process warping and stunting the physiognomy of the age-old prayers of the Catholic Roman and Latin Church. Solutions did exist, namely in the form of effective, even like former, alternative liturgies, such as the neo-gallican and the German ones, which some priests still remembered. In addition, critical and

other studies of the history of the Church began to reveal the relativity of the categorical representations by certain proponents of the petrification of the Roman Liturgy.

Whereas at the first Vatican Council (1869-1870), many bishops urged for reforms of the Roman breviary, which received a negative response, the following decades were spent in stillness. Only a limited number of discreet complaints and a few timid wishes for correction of the rubrics were heard. Ultramontanism was fashionable: those deviating from the right path required to be returned to the Roman Liturgy without conditions. This liturgy was presented as the most perfect possible and was therefore in no need of reform. Nevertheless, a few alert people, such as Chaillot in 1885 in the *Analecta Iuris Pontificii* and Piacenza from 1889 on in *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, continued to draw attention to the problem. Everything changed from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, when several German pastoral journals made very concrete proposals for the reform of the Breviary and the topics attached to it. Of primary importance was the highlighting by Bäumer in 1895 and 1905 of the vota of Vatican I on the Breviary until the "initium" of the chirograph establishing the reform commission in July 1911: "Quod Patribus Concilii fuit in votis" [What the conciliar fathers wanted]. At the same time (1900 and 1901), two brochures on the Breviary were published in France by Mgr. Isoard, Bishop of Annecy, who this time urged real reforms. These texts will play a catalytic role in the initiation of the reform. Piacenza presents them in 1901 in his *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, and resumes them with this salient phrase "Quid nostrum ergo est, nisi petere, deprecari, suppliciter exorare" [We are left to ask, pray, humbly beg] making it the incantatory refrain of his liturgical activism in the years to come.

At the same time, a comparable idea of a general revision (not of general reform!) of the liturgical books grew in Rome, notably around Giovanni Mercati and Louis Duchesne, who were members of the historical-liturgical commission of 1902. This commission awoke real reform-related ideas among some liturgists (rubricists), as is also expressed in the article by Alexandre Grospellier: "De l'état actuel des livres liturgiques" [On the current state of the liturgical books], which the Congregation of rites asked him to write in 1902 (but which was only published in 1911). Meanwhile, Pietro Piacenza continued to publish, in the *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, vanguard and more specific ideas on the need for the restoration of the temporal, obscured by the sanctoral, and to re-establish the beautiful texts of the offices of the temporal of the Breviary and the Missal. He insisted on deleting the obvious anomalies in the organization of the liturgical year, in which the value scale had been reversed: Christ must

yield to the saints! The year 1906 is crucial for the maturing of his ideas. That year, he publishes a programme-article in *Ephemerides Liturgicae* and in 1907 he comments on the Apostolic Constitution of Gregory XIII, regarding the local calendars of Spain (1573), published in the *Acta Sanctae Sedis*. Pope Gregory argued that saints that were specific to the local Church should not invade the general calendar. Piacenza used the official Vatican publication as a stepping stone for his very detailed reform proposals.

It is also around this time that the liturgical movement initiated by Lambert Beauduin takes off in Belgium. In 1909, he proposes the restoration of the use of the Sunday mass texts as one of the objectives of the liturgical movement. Even before this action grows to maturity, he receives more than he hoped for. The awakening of biblical spirituality as the basis for personal spiritual life, under the inspiration of Giacomo della Chiesa, the future Benedict XV, uncovered the wealth hidden in liturgical prayer. Everything was in place, except an outbreak of creativity and dynamism required to find solutions that responded to the needs of the time.

Preludes

346 years have passed between the Breviary of Pius V and the one of Pius X. After nine commissions and ten popes who were interested in the Breviary, and after a multitude of reform vows, scores of corrections, several parallel breviaries, two surveys, one Council, dozens of complaints and proposals from authors, academics and historians of religion, we arrive at the year 1911, the height of the reign of the former parish priest Guiseppe Sarto having become Pope Pius X. The reform of Pope Pius X is the result of a slow ripening of mentality and personal initiatives. It is not the advancement of historical knowledge, investigations or scholarly reflections on the nature of the Christian liturgy. On the contrary, the Pope began to listen to complaints from the base, summarized by Piacenza. He agreed with the simple solutions suggested to him.

In late 1910, the liturgical publisher Pustet introduced a request for a new typical edition of the Breviary. This event is the start of a sort of competition, in the Congregation of rites, for the best project of the correction of the Breviary. Some take advantage of the occasion and introduce their own reform ideas. Piacenza composed a long note *De Officio Dominicarum per annum restituendo ac de missis earum et feriarum maiorum numquam omittendis* [On the restoration of the Sunday office during the year and the non-omission of their masses and those of the major holidays] (dated 1910) which takes up and expands a previous document

(dating back, roughly, to 1908-1909): *Sommario del Motu proprio De Officio Dominicarum per annum restituendo ac de missis earum et feriarum maiorum non omittendis* [Summary of the Motu proprio in Sunday offices during the year and the non-omission of their masses and those of the major holidays]. To revise the rubrics, he proposes to grant the Sunday office pre-eminence, to read the scriptural lessons more frequently, together with their responses. He also suggested an abbreviation of the nocturnes on Sunday by a curious arrangement of the office of Trinity Sunday destined to serve as a substitute for the minor Sundays offices; and the limitation of the use of votive offices and the masses for the deceased. In a very elaborate historico-theological statement, he emphasizes the eminence of the Lord's day and brings it into harmony with the pastoral need for the abbreviation of the Sunday office. La Fontaine on his side, in association with Franz Brehm, liturgical advisor of Pustet, develops a somewhat bizarre plan : *Observationes and innovationes fortasse futuras* [Observations and possible changes for the future] (November 1910). He suggests a partial redistribution of the Psalms of Matins, first applied exclusively to lent, later expanded to the entire year. Brugnani, another influent member of the commission, remains closer to the demands of Pustet in his *Progetto di modificazione e riforma relative alle Rubriche del Breviario e del Missale romano* [project for the modification and reform of the rubrics of the Breviary and the Missal] (1910-1911). He admits a few modest changes and corrections in the rubrics.

Piacenza continues to develop, in secret, his wide reform programme: «*Progetto segreto per una riforma del breviario in modo che si dica il salterio intero ogni settimana, e l'ufficio, con tutto ciò sia più breve, oltre essere più vario*, [Secret project for a reform of the Breviary in such a way that the entire Psalter is said every week and that the office, even if abridged, becomes more varied] which brings together all the elements contained in its earlier publications.

On May 29, 1911, Pope Pius X asked him to develop his plans. To fully achieve the goal of preserving the recitation of the entirety of the Psalter in one week, this reform has to be combined with the reorganization of the relations between the sanctoral and the temporal. In order to restore the Sunday office, it has to be given priority over the many double feasts. At the time, it was the single project encompassing all aspects of the recitation of the divine office that seemed achievable in the short term. On June 29, 1911, Pope Pius X gave permission to La Fontaine, the secretary of the Congregation of rites and future president of the reform commission, to officially start the work, and he established an ad-hoc commission

with a chirograph dated July 2. L'«initium» du chirographe fait le lien avec le Concile de Vatican I et sert de justification: « Quod Patribus Concilii fuit in votis ». [Ce que souhaitaient les Pères conciliaires]. In response to a request for some minor corrections, the Pope thus opened a new horizon on a wide and substantial reform of the Roman Liturgy.

The Pope and the reform commission of the Breviary

The choice of the members of the commission was made by La Fontaine and Piacenza. They recruited them exclusively among members of the «Commissio liturgica» of the Congregation of rites, who were no more than routine rubricists. La Fontaine arranged matters in such a way that this commission was legally independent of the Congregation of rites and placed directly under the authority of the Pope, represented by Giovanni Bressan, his first private secretary. Among the members of the commission, the only one who had a certain liturgical qualification was Pietro Piacenza, one of the best known rubricists at the time. La Fontaine appreciated the liturgical ceremonies as spiritual and aesthetic source of his faith. Leopold Fonck, biblicist, joined in but he participated little. Mercati, the learned historian, refused to participate. Piacenza and La Fontaine themselves criticized the lack of qualification of the commission. The great liturgists of the time, Fernand Cabrol, Henri Quentin and Raphael Andoyer were consulted sporadically. Mercati and Batiffol were consulted only once, and for issues of secondary importance.

The Pope followed the affairs closely, through Bressan. He soon provided the Commission with a page written in his hand containing concrete guidelines. The central point is contained in this sentence: "Se non si potesse ottenere questa riforma con questa aurea semplicità, è meglio lasciare le cose come sono. " [If it is not possible to lead this reform towards a simplification, it is better to leave things as they were]. He also stated that the feasts of the saints and the Vespers of Sunday should not be tampered with. Throughout the duration of the work he intervened, directly or indirectly, more than a hundred times. He maintained La Fontaine as president of the commission, although the latter wished to resign twice. Piacenza repeatedly refers to the fact that Pius X wanted a reform of the Breviary since the time that he was a parish priest and Canon, a statement which is not confirmed by other sources.

The reform programme and its implementation

The instructions of Pius X and the projects of Piacenza and Brugnani served as guidelines for the commission. In a first period, from July 2, 1911 to December 21, 1912, the commission

dealt with the reform of the Psalter and related topics. They quickly agreed on the change of the structure of the weekly [=ferial] offices, the splitting of the longer Psalms, the reduction of the matins from 18 (Sunday) or 12 (weekdays) Psalms to nine Psalms or portions of Psalms. They accepted without problems the changes from eight to five Psalms for lauds. They hesitated on the Compline and the minor hours. The Pope and some members of the commission are in favour of conserving their traditional state, but the requirement of shortness presses them to insert them into the system of the current psalmody. However, long and vivid discussions were needed in order to reach an agreement on the modalities for the distribution of the 150 psalms over the entire week. Piacenza's scheme focussed on a partially devotional choice for distributing the Psalms (Thursday: the Eucharist, Friday: passion, Saturday: the Holy Virgin) while Brugnani held on as strictly as possible to the current psalmody and to the existing cursus. Despite the intervention of the arbitrator Franz Brehm, called from Germany on a proposal from the Cardinals of the Congregation of rites, who sides with Piacenza, the Pope chooses Brugnani's scheme against the majority of the commission. This scheme involved the practice of both types of lauds (penitential and others), widely criticized by most liturgists. It introduced a new series of hymns in the lauds. All by all, his plan resulted in a much longer office on Sundays than on weekdays. The disjunction of Psalms 62-66 and of the venerable triad 148-149-150 in lauds was accepted without real discussion. More efforts were needed to find the rubrical formulas that guaranteed the reasoned precedence of the temporal to the sanctoral. November 2 became a liturgical day with a complete office, developed in parallel with the structure of the offices of the Triduum sacrum and both with a (partial) new choice of the Psalms and readings.

The bulla *Divino afflatu*, a text consisting of contributions of La Fontaine and Piacenza, who approves the reform, is dated November 1, 1911. The *editio typica* of the new Psalter bears the date of 15 November but printing finished close to December 20, 1911, date of submission to the Pope. On January 23, 1912, the *Mutationes Breviarii Romani* were published, bringing together all changes in a single issue. It is a kind of *vade mecum* for printing houses and users, stating how the old Breviaries should be used pending a new *editio typica*. It will be quickly overtaken by the consequences of the new reform initiatives that will come in 1912 and 1913.

The basic principles of the reform agreed upon, it was time to return to the primordial chore: the publication of a new typical edition of the Breviary. Aware of the multiple remaining

shortcomings of the Breviary, and challenged by new opportunities opened up in the process of the new Psalter, the Commission members venture to a new step on the path of reform, with the permission of the Pope. Between December 21, 1912 and February 12, 1913, the commission worked on the reform of the general calendar and comes up with a new wording of the general rubrics of the breviary. Under pressure from publishers, who fear that the new typical edition will be postponed to a remote and uncertain date, and following the doubts of La Fontaine on the legal position of the commission, the work comes to a grinding halt. Despite all and to the great dissatisfaction of La Fontaine, Brugnani and Piacenza continue their attempts to introduce new reforms, both in the corpus of the Breviary and in the rubrics. They were logical consequences of the reforms endorsed by *Divino afflatu*. To resolve this ambiguity, La Fontaine, on May 5, 1913, prepares a schema of *Motu proprio* offering names and programme to be used by a new and much enlarged commission, which would have the task to carry out the great reform of the Breviary. He proposes cardinal Rampolla as president. Pope Pius X conditionally approves it, but the candidate does not accept and the new reform commission will never start its workings.

Then, Piacenza, taking advantage of this new reform momentum, almost out of the blue, on August 22, 1913 succeeds to have the Pope and the commission to accept several important changes, which are designed to remove a series of class I and class II saint feasts still attached to a Sunday; and to abolish the perpetual reposition of the feasts outside classes I and II. He goes back to his old wishes that aim at a strict match between the responses and the lessons in Matins and at a purification of the local calendars by replacing them with the general calendar of the Roman Church. Therefore, mid-September 1913, the printing of the typical edition by Pustet is interrupted on demand of the Congregation of the rites. The commission retracts the *Mutationes* of June 11, already published, and corrects them following the latest decisions. As a result, on September 23, 1913 *Novae Mutationes* appeared in print. All these new decisions will form the main content of *Abhinc duos annos* and the annex Decree of October 28, 1913.

But publishers remain wary. Late February 1914, the publishing houses accredited to the Congregation of the rites directly addressed the Pope in order to obtain formal and public assurance of the stability of the text of the Breviary and its rubrics, of which they have started to print a typical edition. In the meantime, the Vatican publishes a new edition of the Psalter, dated March 15, 1914, containing the latest adaptation. This time the publishers are successful and the reformist zeal fades away, temporarily. The Pustet editio typica in four volumes was

released in the last days of April 1914 and the Vatican edition in one volume eight months later. However, the two decrees of approval bear the same date, namely March 25, 1914.

The publication of the adaptation of the rubrics in the Missal is expected by the end of October 1914, but in fact it will take another six years. At the same time and soon after this, the new forms the offices for breviary and for the mass, of the common of several virgins and several confessors, was to be prepared mainly by Brugnani. But by the will of La Fontaine, approved by the Pope, they will not be part of the Breviary itself but be located in the annexes.

The death of Pius X on August 20, 1914 meant the end of the promised overall reform of the liturgical books. Giacomo della Chiesa, the future Benedict XV, in a letter to Piacenza on November 7, 1913, expressed his disapproval of some aspects of the reform. He was not opposed to the reform itself, but to what he considered had been a messy job. La Fontaine, too, preferred not to continue with the existing commission. In November 1914, he submitted to Pope Benedict XV a concise report of all the activities of the commission since the beginning. On February 19, 1915 the Cardinals of the Congregation of the rites discuss the document, and on that same day the fate of the commission was finally decided upon. In the Roman Curia, there was more than one opponent to the reform of the Breviary. On March 5, 1915, La Fontaine was appointed Patriarch of Venice. He will later (in 1930) testify that he fell into disfavour with Benedict XV at the instigation of members of the Congregation of rites because of the reform.

Receipt of the reform

On December 21, 1911, the *Osservatore Romano* announced, on its first page, the publication of the new Psalter, followed by a brief editorial comment. The anonymous author begins by reassuring the reader: the Psalter "non ha subito nessun cambiamento sostanziale." [The Psalter did not undergo substantial change]. There is an apologetic tone in this text. The author seems to have knowledge of certain resistances. The article takes the opportunity to remind its readers of the exclusive authority of the Holy See in liturgical matters, highlighting the personal commitment of the Pope in the reform. In various countries, the response was prompt and positive, and was considered a valuable answer to wishes already formulated the previous years. Piacenza evokes the sympathetic reactions from "ex omni parte Catholici Orbis" [from all over the Catholic World]. According to him, they also expressed the desire

that the reform should be continued, according to a programme that resembled his own projects. A number of these letters of “gratulationes et gratiarum actiones ad Sanctam Sedem” [thanks and congratulations to the Holy See] could be located in the archives of the Congregation of rites and the papers of Pius X’ private secretariat and numerous others are conserved in the Piacenza papers at the library of the *Ephemerides Liturgicae*. They come from calendarists, rubricists, and historians of Catholic worship, pastoral leaders, bishops and clergy, not really “from all over the world” but mainly from Italy. General comments in the pastoral or spiritual journals for the clergy were descriptive and departed from a point of view practical or spiritual, sometimes interspersed with historical considerations. Next to these, four distinguished historians of Christian worship, Anton Baumstark, Pierre Batiffol, Fernand Cabrol and Camille Callewaert, invest all their knowledge and originality in the matter. They extend the scope of this limited subject, by integrating the reformist Pope's policy into the context of the continuing evolution of the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. These positive reactions (but negative by Baumstark), were often mentioned in official documents and, repeatedly, by Piacenza in its multiple writings of justification of the changes.

But not all reactions were positive. The atmosphere of both enthusiasm and annoyance among those interested, just after the reform, cannot be better translated than by this anonymous testimony (L. R.) in the *Revue Grégorienne*: «La disposition de l’ancienne distribution, plus que millénaire, du Psautier ‘per hebdomadam’ ne peut pas être réalisée sans causer quelques regrets à ceux qui ont un sentiment profond du respect dû aux traditions. Prompte et sans arrière-pensée, leur obéissance n’en sera que plus méritoire. Le clergé et les fidèles accepteront avec soumission et avec joie la nouvelle réforme, et y verront une preuve nouvelle de la sollicitude de Sa Sainteté Pie X pour le culte divin.” [The arrangement of the more than thousand years old distribution of the Psalter 'per hebdomadam' cannot be changed without causing some regret among those who have a deep sense of respect for traditions. Prompt and without ulterior motives, their obedience will be more than meritorious. The clergy and the faithful will accept with submission and joy the new reform, and will see in it a new proof of the solicitude of his Holiness Pope Pius X for divine worship.]

The reform had its indifferent and even its fierce opponents. Two of the great historians of Christian worship mentioned do not hide their criticism. The future cardinal Mercati called the commission an association of incompetents. Baumstark gives the impression in his writings that the entire Catholic world was upset and struggling with the bold destruction of

the millennial tradition, perpetrated by Pope Pius X and his Committee of ignorants. It is true that these harsh voices come mainly from scholars and theorists and that those engaged in pastoral work were otherwise positive, without being undifferentiated. Even Piacenza must concede that not only the scholars criticized the reform: “Nil mirum ergo si etiam adversus Breviarium a b.m. Pio Papa X recognitum et reformatum, plurimae apud praesertim minorem Clerum, qui uti iam diximus quietam vivendi rationem summopere diligit, obortae sunt lamentationes ac censurae.” [It is therefore no wonder that against the Breviary recognized and reformed by Pope Pius X, lamentations and obstructions are voiced, especially among the lower clergy, who as we have already said prefer above all to not be disturbed]. Piacenza tried, between 1915 and his death in 1919, in a series of 'Epistolae apologeticae', to justify the reform. The most stubborn resistance can be localized in some circles of the Roman Curia, particularly in the Secretariate of Briefs to Princes and of Latin Letters [*Secretaria Brevium ad Principes et Secretaria Epistolarum Latinarum*] and the Chancery [*Cancellaria Apostolica*].

The new psalter was an absolute obligation for those using the Roman Breviary of Pius V (1586). The Breviaries which had been exempted of the obligation to use this breviary (Ambrosian, monasticum, Braga, etc.) were therefore not affected by *Divino afflatu*. However, the Congregation of the rites requested certain adaptations to the new rubrics in order to bring them in line with the reform. Exemptions in individual cases, for reasons of physical disability, had always existed. On the other hand, exemption from the requirement to use the new Psalter and the new rubrics for reasons of "mental incapacity to adapt to the reform" were not foreseen. Then, opponents of the reformed Breviary are seeking a way to escape liability by asking for an *indultum* to the Congregation of the Council to continue with the old Breviary. But Pius X does not delude himself and he categorically requires the prefect of the Congregation of the Council to publish the severe Decree of March 10, 1913, to thwart sabotage of his reform.

Balance

Despite divergent opinions, contradictory influences, strong and opposite characters, in 1914 the new editio typica «reformata» of the Breviary came out, definitively more important than the "restituta" of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). In the same way as all attempts of the previous centuries, the reform of 1911-1914 was constantly confronted with the tension between continuity and rupture. The Pius X reformers neither circumvented nor fled the

challenge, as their predecessors did, but they faced it, persevered and won. The modern liturgical movement was at its beginning. The reform of Pope Pius X gave it a final impulse. Some of the commentators saw in this reformed Breviary a sneaky revenge of the disliked Breviary of Paris of 1736. This may be contradicted both for the broad options as for the details. More crucial to the shaping of the 1911 reform programme were the wishes presented to the Vatican Council I, regularly revived by the ecclesiastical authors for forty years, to be finally presented to Pius X.

At the request of Pietro Piacenza Pope Pius X permitted the insertion in *Divino Afflatu* of the promise of a general reform of the liturgy. In his second reform decree, *Abhinc duos annos* (1913), he confirmed his commitment, enclosing a sketch of the future reform programme, to achieve within 30 years. Pius XII was up to the mark, when on May 10, 1946, exactly thirty-two years later, he asked cardinal Salotti to examine the old reform programme. The bold reforms of Pius XII were submitted to Vatican II, which included the questions. Those who did the reform of the Breviary and the calendar this time were aware of finally completing the reform undertaken and desired by Pope Pius X. With this reform, Pius X had brought the first decisive blow to the monolithic block of the Roman Liturgy, and proved that it was not impossible to reform it, and therefore to facilitate subsequent steps. One of the motifs of the reform of Pope Pius X was to restore the Roman Liturgy and lead it to its original purity, free from the «squalor vetustatis» [grime of the time] as quoted from *Abhinc duos annos*. We detect the same attitude in the reforms of Pius XII and Vatican II.

Texte anglais de Michael Meeuwis